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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to assess high school students' opinions concerning issues relating to homework assignments. A questionnaire about homework was completed by 210 selected high school seniors in 7 rural Tennessee high schools. Findings indicate that 83 percent of respondents were assigned homework on a regular basis, with about two-thirds receiving assignments in three or more subjects daily. Two-thirds of students completed their homework in 1-3 hours. Although 91 percent said that homework was directly related to what they were taught in class that day, only 37 percent felt that homework was beneficial and only about 21 percent felt it was reasonable in terms of time and work required for completion. Only a third felt that homework motivated them to learn more about the topics they were studying. About a quarter of students indicated that homework was sometimes or often used as punishment for misconduct. Over 90 percent indicated that homework was usually or always collected and graded, and 71 percent felt that teachers gave adequate instruction on how to complete assignments. Five hypothetical and problematic homework assignments are described, and general recommendations for assignments are suggested. Survey questions and responses are included. (SV)

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STUDENT OPINIONS CONCERNING HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS IN SEVEN RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS

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Introduction and Research Design

Homework continues to be used to supplement classroom instruction in most rural high schools. There is considerable diversity in the type and amount of homework assigned. Many educators consider homework beneficial; however, little has been reported about how students perceive homework.

This study was designed to assess high school students' opinions concerning issues relating to homework assignments. A questionnaire was developed and distributed to selected high school seniors in seven rural high schools in Tennessee. A total of 210 completed questionnaires, 30 per high school, were utilized in the study. A random selection process was used to determine the sample.

Presentation of the Data

The data follow in an item-by-item manner. Each item shows number and percent responding to each question.

1. Do your teachers assign homework on a regular basis?

   Yes 124 (83%) No 36 (17%)

2. In how many subjects each day do you receive homework assignments?

A.	1-2	51 (24%)
B.	3-4	106 (51%)
C.	Over 4	32 (15%)
D.	Usually Not Each Day	21 (10%)

3. How much time is required to complete your homework assignments each day?

A.	Less than One hour	18 (8%)
B.	1-3 hours	140 (67%)
C.	More than three hours	31 (15%)
D.	Usually Not Each Day	21 (10%)

4. Do your homework assignments relate directly to what you were taught in class that day?

Yes 191 (91%) No 19 (9%)

5. Do you feel that homework is beneficial?

Yes 78 (37%) No 132 (63%)

6. Do you feel that your homework assignments are reasonable in terms of time required for their completion?

Yes 46 (22%) No 164 (78%)

7. Do you feel that your homework assignments are reasonable in terms of the amount of work required for their completion?

Yes 44 (21%) No 166 (79%)

8. Are your homework assignment relevant to the material you are expected to learn?

Yes 121 (58%) No 89 (42%)

9. Do your homework requirements motivate you to learn more about the topics you are studying?

Yes 69 (33%) No 141 (67%)

10. Homework assignments are used as punishment for misconduct.

A.	Never	25 (12%)
B.	Rarely	131 (62%)
C.	Sometimes	39 (19%)
D.	Often	15 (7%)

11. Homework assignments are collected and graded by your teachers.

A.	Never	12 (6%)
B.	Usually	67 (79%)
C.	Always	31 (15%)

12. Do your teachers give you adequate instruction about how to complete the homework assigned for that day?

Yes 149 (71%) No 61 (29%)

Analysis of Student Responses

Most rural high school teachers, as reported by seniors in this study, assign homework. Some 75% of the respondents said that they received homework assignments in as many as four subjects each day. Fifteen percent of the seniors have homework assigned in over four subjects per day. A total of ten percent have homework on an irregular basis.

Most students (82%) reported that they were required to spend from one to over three hours working on homework assignments for each school day. It is interesting to note that 91 percent of those queired believe that their homework assignment related to classroom instruction. However, most (63%) do not think that homework is beneficial. Similarly, the students were not convinced that their homework assignments were reasonable in terms of time required for completion or the amount of work required.

Over 50 percent of the students in the study stated that homework assignments were relevant to the material which they were expected to learn. Some two-thirds of the respondents indicated that required homework was not motivational.

It is important to note that a majority (74%) either never or rarely experienced homework as a disciplinary measure. Conversely, some 26 percent indicated that

homework was assigned as a punitive measure. In most cases homework assignments were either "usually" (79%) or "always" (15%) collected and graded. Only six percent of those in the study reported that assignment were never collected and graded. Most students (71%) included in the study were of the opinion that they were given proper instruction concerning how to complete their homework assignments.

Related Situations and Recommendations

Consider the following homework assignments:

Situation

Write a five hundred word theme on "The Plight of Endangered Species in North America" as punishment for talking during our class today.

This assignment violates a disciplinary principle that homework should not be used for punishment. Also, the teacher may be punishing the entire class because of the actions of a few individuals. An assignment such as this may cause students to dislike the subject and dread your classes.

Recommendation

Do not use homework assignments for punishment.

Evaluate the next teacher's assignment:

Situation

Work the thirty problems on page 46. (Don't worry about neatness for I won't collect the papers.)

This assignment leaves much to be desired. The teacher should be sure that the students will need to work that many problems to grasp the principles or concepts to be learned. Often the number of problems can be greatly reduced with the same mastery of concepts or principles resulting. The focus of homework assignments should be on quality, not quantity. Students resent "busy work" and often do it in a mechanical fashion. Also, if students knew that homework were not going to be collected or graded, some will fail to bother with it or students will copy from each other.

Long, repetitious assignments may engender more parental complaints.

Recommendation

Make assignments reasonable and relevant to the material to be learned.

Analyze the following assignment:

Situation

Read Chapter Four in your textbook and work the problems on page 118. (This should take you about three hours - if you need any help ask someone at home.)

This is hard on morale! The thought of having to spend several hours on an assignment will turn many students off before they begin. The assumption that there is someone at home to help is a poor one. Another fault lies in the fact that one teacher is asking for three hours of the students' homework time. The teacher should know the approximate

amount of time the faculty has agreed upon for each student in academic classes to spend on homework, and the teacher should assign work that will not exceed an agreed upon share of that time. Otherwise, the student may be assigned an impossible amount of homework on some nights.

Recommendation

A school policy should be developed concerning outside assignments.

Another homework assignment follows:

Situation

Study the new concepts presented in Chapter 7 and work the problems found at the end of the chapter.

New principles or concepts should not be presented in homework assignments. The reason for this is that the student may not be able to understand the new principles or concepts without explanation from the teacher. The best homework assignments reinforce what the student has learned in class.

Recommendation

Homework should support classroom activities and reinforce both objectives and lesson plans.

The next homework assignment follows:

Consider the homework assignment which follows:

Situation

Memorize the Gettysburg Address.

Unless there is a good reason for memorizing information, the time required for doing so could be spent

to greater advantage in other learning activities. Following the so-called "Iron Law of Learning" (Use It or Lose It), much of what a student may memorize may be soon forgotten.

Recommendation

Homework assignments should enhance positive teaching techniques.

Instead of expecting that all assignments be completed after school hours, it might be well to consider study time during the regular school day. An obvious advantage is that a student having difficulty with the assignment is in the classroom with the teacher and can get aid immediately.

Summary

Since homework is probably going to be a part of the teaching-learning process of most schools for the forseeable future, teachers and other school leaders should make it as meaningful as possible. Therefore, we should evaluate continuously all homework assignments to be sure they are relevant and congruent with instructional objectives. Many school districts are implementing "Homework Help Lines" to assist students with their assignments after regular school hours.